Module 1 Lecture: Process and Difference in the Pluriverse
Plato, James and DuBois: Situating Pluralism

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This course deploys process-relational philosophy to address the challenge of thinking and acting with creativity and compassion in an increasingly complex and pluralistic set of social and ecological contexts—a set of contexts now widely referred to as the *Anthropocene*. It will draw upon an array of diverse thinkers, including radical empiricist William James, revolutionary sociologist W. E. B. Du Bois, pluralist political scientist William Connolly, process theologian Catherine Keller, process Marxian Anne Pomeroy, multispecies philosopher Donna Haraway, Gaian sociologist Bruno Latour, and object-oriented eco-critic Timothy Morton, among others. Each in their own way brings the metaphysics of process-relational pluralism down to earth by articulating it's relevance to the struggle for social, economic, racial, and ecological justice. Their ideas and methods provide a means of reimagining classical liberal constructs (like individualism and sociocentrism) by offering a more relational form of identity and a more receptive and participatory way of encountering difference (whether based in species, race, class, gender, religion, or political ideology).

I hope this course provides a place for us to imagine a more symbiotic future together. I doubt there will be any *answers* that emerge from what we study together, but I do hope we will get closer to asking the right—that is, the *life enhancing, creativity engendering*—questions. My goal is to infect your political passions with process-relational ideas, to invite you into the role of the *engaged* philosopher or philosopher-activist. Activism becomes philosophical (in the process-relational context explored in this course) when it affirms an ethos rooted in *relational alterity* and *creative becoming*. Such an orientation provides an antidote to the neoliberal ethos rooted in private identity, alienated labor, and the reduction of all social relations to economic exchanges in a global marketplace.

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In this first module, we read several excerpts from William James work—including passages on the embodied sociality and affective relationality of the self, on the ageless philosophical dilemma of the one and the many, and on the pluralist alternative to transcendentalism and absolute idealism. We also read a few chapters by Kennan Ferguson arguing for the continued political potency of James' radical pluralism. Then W. E. B. Du Bois' philosophical contributions were introduced and tied to the Jamesian pragmatist lineage in a chapter from Cornel West's book *The American Evasion Philosophy*. Finally, a few sections of

Shamoon Zamir's book *Dark Voices* unpacked the idea of "double-consciousness" and provided a more critical look at Du Bois' inheritance from James.

Before discussing James' pragmatic, pluralistic, and radically empirical perspective and its influence on Du Bois' revolutionary synthesis of sociology with autobiography and literature, I want to set a broader context for this course by returning to an earlier philosophical instigator of novel political theory and practice: Plato.

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"The safest general characterization of the European philosophical tradition," Whitehead tells us, "is that it consists of a series of footnotes to Plato."[1] In perhaps his most influential dialogue, the *Republic*, Plato uses the mouthpiece of Socrates to articulate his vision of Justice. He elucidates this vision by constructing an ideal "city in words" whose structure is imagined by analogy to the justly ordered soul. Examining the form of Justice at work in the city, Socrates claims, provides us with a magnified macrocosmic image of the microcosmic workings of Justice in the soul. The just constitution of the philosophic soul and the just constitution of the ideal city are reciprocally constituted: if individual souls are not just, the social whole cannot be just; similarly, if the social whole is not just, individual souls cannot be just. Socrates describes the soul, not as a simple unity, but as tripartite, having a rational or thinking part, an appetitive or feeling part, and a spirited or willing part. Analogously, he describes the ideal city as stratified into three main classes of people: warriors (in whom willing predominates), producers (including farmers, craftsman, merchants, doctors, artists, lawyers, etc., in whom feeling predominates), and guardians or philosopher-kings (in whom thinking predominates). The ideally ordered soul, like the ideally ordered city, is said to depend upon the properly balanced arrangement of these parts.

Socrates asks his interlocutors (Glaucon and Adimantus) whether it would be justifiable for the guardians of a city to contrive a "noble lie" that would lead every citizen to become "more inclined to care for the city and one another" (415d). Socrates then shares what has come to be called the "Myth of Metals." He says the order of his city would result from his having persuaded, first the rulers and the soldiers, and then the rest of the city, that their childhood memories are mere dreams, that they have no human parents and were in fact born and raised deep in the bowels of the earth, who is their real mother. The land they inhabit remains their mother and nurse, and so they must maintain and protect it from attack, and relate to their fellow citizens as siblings all born of the earth. Socrates continues:

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[1] Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 39.

'All of you in the city are certainly brothers,' we shall say to them in telling the tale, 'but the god, in fashioning those of you who are competent to rule, mixed gold in at their birth; this is why they are most honored; in auxiliaries, silver; and iron and bronze in the farmers and the other craftsmen. So, because you're all related, although for the most part you'll produce offspring like yourselves, it sometimes happens that a silver child will be born from a golden parent, a golden child from a silver parent, and similarly all the others from each other. Hence the god commands the rulers first and foremost to keep careful watch over the children, seeing which of these metals is mixed in their souls. And, if a child of theirs should be born with an admixture of bronze or iron, by no manner of means are they to take pity on it, but shall assign the proper value to its nature and thrust it out among the craftsmen or the farmers; and, again, if from these men one should naturally grow who has an admixture of gold or silver, they will honor such ones and lead them up, some to the guardian group, others to the auxiliary…'" (414d-415c).[2]

Twentieth century interpretations of the *Republic* vary widely. Perhaps the most vicious critique came from philosopher of science Karl Popper, who attacked Plato's vision of Justice as "purely totalitarian and anti-humanitarian."[3] Popper was traumatized by the rise of Nazism in central Europe. He barely escaped the annexation of his home country Austria in 1938 by taking a university post in New Zealand, where he wrote *The Open Society and Its Enemies*. His attack on Plato's (and Hegel's) organismic theory of a supposedly "closed society" was a desperate attempt to diagnose and cure a far more complex cosmopolitical problem. Popper erroneously interprets Plato's vision as the reduction of the individual soul to nothing but an imperfect copy of the holistic Ideal state.[4] As we will see, if anything, Plato's intention is (rejecting Popper's misuse of the term and retrieving Bergson's original meaning in *Two Sources of Morality and Religion*[5]) to create an "open society," open to the creative influence of cosmic Ideas and not closed in upon itself (as modern sociocentrism insists): "no State can be happy which is not designed by artists who imitate the heavenly pattern" (500e). Further, Plato prizes the esoteric visions of individual philosophers and their learning communities far more than any pretend plans for an Ideal city. His "city of words" rewards many interpretations. It is rigorous dialectic, hilarious comedy, and outrageous tragedy. It is theory and it is story. But in the end, Plato's purpose is predominantly *spiritual*. He is trying to convert his readers to a new view of a deeper reality.

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[2] *The Republic of Plato*. Transl. Allan Bloom (Basic Books, 1991).

[3] Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies* (Princeton University Press, 2013), 85.

[4] Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies* (Princeton University Press, 2013),

[5] See "Henri Bergson: Activist Mysticism and the Open Society" in *Political Science Reviewer* (Fall 1979, Vol. 9, No. 1) by Dante Germino (https://isistatic.org/journal-archive/pr/09_01/germino.pdf).

The political philosopher Eric Voegelin, in contrast to Popper, praised Plato for the *Republic*'s profound inquiry into the nature of human society as

> "a little world, a cosmion, illuminated with meaning from within by the human beings who continuously create and bear it as the mode and condition of their self-realization. It is illuminated through an elaborate symbolism...and this symbolism illuminates it with meaning in so far as the symbols make the internal structure of such a cosmion, the relations between its members and groups of members, as well as its existence as a whole, transparent for the mystery of human existence."[6]

In a letter to Leo Strauss, Voegelin put aside his usual, academically refined tone to refer to Popper's reading of the *Republic* as "impudent, dilettantish crap."[7] More recently, sociologist Robert Bellah similarly dismissed Popper's reading of a "conservative" or reactionary Plato as "wildly off the mark": in his ideal city, Plato insists on radical gender equality (as women participate in the guardian and even warrior classes), expropriates the property of the ruling class (they are forbidden to handle money, own private homes, or have families), eliminates slavery (a widespread institution in Plato's day), and institutes meritocracy. As Bellah puts it, "...some of Plato's rules are indeed coercive. They coerce, however, the rulers far more than the ruled, and seem designed to avert rather than create tyranny."[8]

In the end, Bellah cautions us not to take Plato's dialogue too literally, since the whole experiment to create a "city in words" was undertaken by Socrates principally to guide his interlocutors toward a spiritual vision of the Just and the Good within their souls. Strauss also does not ultimately read the *Republic* as a political blueprint for "the best possible regime," but rather as Plato's elaborately ironic admission that, due to the inherent limitations of earthly political life, constructing an ideal city capable of meeting the highest needs of the soul is laughably impossible.[9] The *Republic* thus serves a primarily *religious* end, aiming to convert its readers by evoking an experience of Justice within their souls. "Perhaps," says Socrates, "there is a pattern of [the ideal city] laid up in heaven for him who wishes to contemplate it and so beholding to constitute himself its citizen. But it makes no difference whether it exists now or ever will come into being. The politics of this city only will be his and of none other" (592b).

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[6] Voegelin, *New Science of Politics*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 27, 162.

[7] *Faith and Political Philosophy* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2004), 67-68.

[8] Bellah, *Religion in Human Evolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011), 388-389.

[9] *History of Political Philosophy*, edited by Leo Strauss and Joseph Cropsey (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 68, 174.

For Voegelin, Plato's philosophy is "an act of resistance illuminated by conceptual understanding." This philosophical act of resistance is also "an act of salvation for himself and others, in that the evocation of right order and its reconstitution in his own soul becomes the substantive center of a new community." This new community "relieves the pressure of the surrounding corrupt society." "Under this aspect," Voegelin continues, "Plato is the founder of the community of philosophers that lives through the ages."[10]

In Voegelin's terms, if Plato's Myth of Medals is a "symbol" designed by Plato to give the individual members of his ideal city a sense of meaningful participation in a larger social whole, then Plato's Myth of the Cave is a symbol designed to illustrate why philosophers typically *cannot* find a meaningful place within the dominant society, and indeed why their "queer" natures make them, at best, "useless" to their cities (487b), and, at worst, dangerous threats to be silenced, banished beyond the city walls, or imprisoned and forced to drink the hemlock (e.g., the *Apology*).

Socrates says of the few who "have tasted how sweet and blessed a possession" philosophy is, that, "at the same time":

> "they have seen sufficiently the madness of the many, and that no one who minds the business of the cities does virtually anything sound, and that there is no ally with whom one could go to the aid of justice and be preserved. Rather—just like a human being who has fallen in with wild beasts and is neither willing to join them in doing injustice nor sufficient as one man to resist all the savage animals—one would perish before he has been of any use to city or friends and be of no profit to himself or others. Taking all this into the calculation, he keeps quiet and minds his own business —as a man in a storm, when dust and rain are blown about by the wind, stands aside under a little wall. Seeing others filled full of lawlessness, he is content if somehow he himself can live his life here pure of injustice and unholy deeds, and take his leave from it graciously and cheerfully with fair hope" (496c-496e).

One of the principle contentions of this course is that, rather than abandoning the many and taking leave from the political fray, the *engaged* philosopher is called not only to love the wisdom within their own souls, but to love wisdom *publicly* as citizens of their cities and of the cosmos. As Cornel West put it, "justice is what love looks like in public." Becoming a philosopher-activist doesn't necessarily mean seeking political office. It could mean, like Socrates, speaking one's mind in the agora, upsetting social habits by challenging traditional categories. Doing so carries mortal risks: Socrates was accused of blasphemy and put to death by his society. May all our ideas become so dangerous.

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[10] Voegelin, *Plato and Aristotle*, 68-69.

In contrast to the "noble lie" of the Myth of Medals, Plato's Myth of the Cave should be referred to as a "true myth," since it depicts Plato's understanding of the role of the philosopher as a mediator between the true and beautiful light of the highest Good radiating from above and the shadow-illusions enveloping the common people chained in the cave below. "Make an image," Socrates invites us,

"of our nature in its education and want of education, likening it to a condition of the following kind. See human beings as though they were in an underground cavelike dwelling with its entrance, a long one, open to the light across the whole width of the cave. They are in it from childhood with their legs and necks in bonds so that they are fixed, seeing only in front of them, unable because of the bond to turn their heads all the way around. Their light is from a fire burning far above and behind them. Between the fire and the prisoners there is a road above, along which see a wall, built like the partitions puppet-handlers set in front of the human beings and over which they show the puppets...Then also see along this wall human beings carrying all sorts of artifacts, which project above the wall, and statues of men and other animals wrought from stone, wood, and every kind of material; as is to be expected, some of the carriers utter sounds while others are silent...do you suppose such men would have seen anything of themselves and one another other than the shadows cast by the fire on the side of the cave facing them?...And what about the things that are carried by? Isn't it the same with them?...If they were able to discuss things with one another, don't you believe they would hold that they are naming these things going by before them that they see?..And what if the prison also had an echo from the side facing them? Whenever one of the men passing by happens to utter a sound do you suppose they would believe that anything other than the passing shadow was uttering the sound?...Then most certainly...such men would hold that the truth is nothing other than the shadows of artificial things...Consider what their release and healing from bonds and folly would be like if something of this sort were by nature to happen to them. Take a man who is released and suddenly compelled to stand up, to turn his neck around, to walk and look up toward the light; and who, moreover, in doing all this is in pain and, because he is dazzled, is unable to make out those things whose shadows he saw before. What do you suppose he'd say if someone were to tell him that before he saw silly nothings, while now, because he is somewhat nearer to what is and more turned toward beings, he sees more correctly; and, in particular, showing him each of the things that pass by, were to compel the man to answer his questions about what they are? Don't you suppose he'd be at a loss and believe that what was seen before is truer than what is now shown?...And, if he compelled him to look at the light itself, would his eyes hurt and would he flee, turning away to those things that he is able to make out and hold them to be really clearer than what is being shown? And if...someone dragged him away from there by force along the rough, steep, upward way and didn't let him go before he had dragged him out into the light of the sun,

wouldn't he be distressed and annoyed at being so dragged? And when he came to the light, wouldn't he have his eyes full of its beam and be unable to see even one of the things now said to be true?...he'd have to get accustomed, if he were going to see what's up above. At first he'd most easily make out the shadows; and after that the phantoms of the human beings and the other things in water; and, later, the things themselves. And from there he could turn to beholding the things in heaven and heaven itself, more easily at night—looking at the light of the stars and the moon—than by day—looking at the sun and sunlight...Then finally...he would be able to make out the sun—not its appearances in water or some alien place, but the sun itself by itself in its own region—and see what it's like...And after that he would already be in a position to conclude about it that this is the source of the seasons and the years, and is the steward of all things in the visible place, and is in a certain way the cause of all those things he and his companions had been seeing" (514a-516c).

Plato's version of the story of the philosopher's escape from the cave ends, finally, with a vision of the solitary Sun, source of all light, sight, and even time itself. He elsewhere celebrates the Sun as a symbol of the Good (508d-509a). But suppose we were to invert Plato, as Whitehead does, by re-imagining his myth so that the nighttime sky became the more revelatory vision? Suppose we were to substitute "the myth of Adam and Eve in the Garden on the first day of human life" for Plato's cave:

> "[they] view the sky at noon on a fine day. It is blue, flooded by the light of the sun. The direct fact of observation is the sun as the sole origin of light, and the bare heavens...They watch the sunset, the stars appear:—'And, Lo!, creation widened to man's view.' The excess of light discloses facts and also conceals them."[11]

Plato, the monist, was ever-faithful to the clear light of the One All-Seeing Sun. But what of the many suns twinkling in the nighttime sky, each lighting its own worlds? The latter is a more fitting image for the pluralistic, process-relational, and aesthetic ontology that we will explore this semester. It is not a matter of rejecting, but of inverting the logic of Plato's myth. As Timothy Morton came close to suggesting in *Humankind* (which we'll read in modules 9 and 10), we need to replace Plato's Cave with Plato's Rave:

Plato's Cave   Plato's Rave

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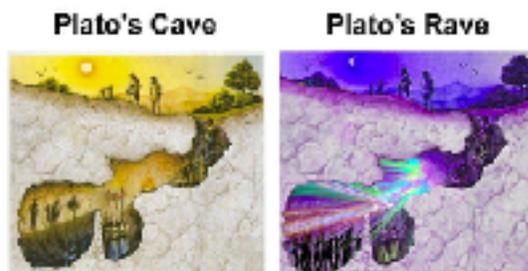
[11] Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas*, 155.

The ultimate locus of reality is found not in the blinding light of self-identical eternal forms hidden in silent stillness behind shadowy appearances, but in the iridescent color and deep bass notes of *concrete and intra-related occasions of experience*. It is *experience* all the way up and all the way down, most of which is non-human. The dualism between cosmos and chaos, order and disorder, is overcome by affirmatively inhabiting a *chaosmos*. An aesthetic ontology is *panexperiential* and *descendental*, rather than correlational or transcendental. It challenges the orthodox plot of the philosophical soul's journey—that is, disembodied rationality's yearning for transcendent perfection—by reversing the vector of the soul's desire: it invites us to *go down* into the complex and intricate folds of experience to find Truth, Beauty, and Goodness, down beneath the oppressively rational, oculocentric consciousness that moderns and ancients alike have for too long enforced as the proper limits of our humanity.[12] The divine chaosmic pattern of our pluriverse is not composed of separative egoic identities (nor the *Republic*'s metallurgic purity), but of sympoietic entanglements and personic resonances (with human and non-human persons). In Morton's terms, reality is "symbiotic," as when in a club "strangely called Earth" he "experienced a rain of human sweat that had accumulated on the ceiling after hours and hours of techno [it was 1989]. Parts of everyone were falling, alien, damp, warm, back onto everyone, because of our own repetitive churning."[13] There is no escape from the earthly cave, no heaven up there to purify our souls of darkness; but hidden in the rhythms of our shadow-play down here below, like a "dark net threading through us,"[14] there are transcendent openings to a divine creativity granting eternal renewal to all our efforts to know and love one another. As Rilke's earthly God tells us, while walking with us out of the night in which we were made:

> "You, sent out beyond your recall,
> go to the limits of your longing.
> Embody me.

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[12] "Philosophers have disdained the information about the universe obtained through their visceral feelings, and have concentrated on visual feelings" (Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 121). See Segall, *Cosmotheanthropic Imagination in the Post-Kantian Process Philosophy of Schelling and Whitehead*, 62ff. and 122ff.

[13] Morton, *Humankind*, 73.

[14] Rilke "The Book of a Monastic Life" (I, 25), in *Rilke's Book of Hours: Love Poems to God*, transl. by Anita Barrows and Joanna Macy (2005).

Flare up like flame
and make big shadows I can move in.

Let everything happen to you: beauty and terror.
Just keep going. No feeling is final.
Don't let yourself lose me."[15]

Reality is not a finished and perfected plan, it is a creative, jazz-like process "open to possibilities uncontrollable in advance."[16] For James, the social pragmatics of reality cocreation are *risky*. No self can survive a genuine encounter with another unchanged. And unlike the monist, James cannot say for certain that the world is saved "unconditionally and from eternity." The world "may be saved on condition that its parts shall do their best. But shipwreck in detail, or even on the whole, is among the open possibilities."[17]

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Let's turn now to Kennan Ferguson's refreshing retrieval of William James pluralism in *Politics in the Pluriverse*. In the two chapters we read, Ferguson repeatedly contrasts James' pragmatic and pluralistic approach to Hegel's idealistic monism. James' pluralism can be understood primarily as a reaction against the nationalistic Americanized version of Hegel popularized by the St. Louis Hegelians in the latter decades of the 19th century.[18] James adopted Hegel as an arch-nemesis of sorts, even though he had plenty of praise for Hegel's "powerful genius," as well: his repeated attacks are a sign of disagreement, but not of disrespect:

> "This dogging of everything by its negative, its fate, its undoing, this perpetual moving on to something future which shall supersede the present, this is the Hegelian intuition of the essential provisionality, and consequent unreality, of everything empirical and finite. Take any concrete finite thing and try to hold it fast. You cannot, for so held, it proves not to be concrete at all, but an arbitrary extract or abstract which you have made from the remainder of empirical reality. The rest of things invades and overflows both it and you together, and defeats

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[15] Rilke, "The Book of a Monastic Life" (I, 59), in *Rilke's Book of Hours: Love Poems to God*, transl. by Anita Barrows and Joanna Macy (2005).

[16] James, *Some Problems of Philosophy* [TWWJ, 270]

[17] James, *Some Problems of Philosophy* [TWWJ, 270]

[18] See Zamir, *Dark Voices*, pgs. 119ff.

your rash attempt. Any partial view whatever of the world tears the part out of its relations, leaves out some truth concerning it, is untrue of it, falsifies it. The full truth about anything involves more than that thing. In the end nothing less than the whole of everything can be the truth of anything at all. Taken so far, and taken in the rough, Hegel is not only harmless, but accurate. There is a dialectic movement in things, if such it please you to call it, one that the whole constitution of concrete life establishes..."

"But," continues James, this movement "is one that can be described and accounted for in terms of the pluralistic vision of things far more naturally than in the monistic terms to which Hegel finally reduced it."[19] While the St. Louis Hegelians and their followers sought the supposed absolute truth of self and society (an absolute truth uniquely revealed to the late 19th century liberal capitalist American mind, advancing upon Hegel's early 19th century Prussian pretensions[20]), James believed that thought and experience contained innumerable irreducibly divergent strains. Any attempt to sum up or totalize these strains under the unified gaze of an Absolute Spirit would inevitably result in the exclusion, marginalization, and subjugation of important differences and creative advances. From James' point of view, difference, even dissension and friction, are essential to human flourishing, while the rationalization, systemization, and centralization so characteristic of the modern mentality are profoundly destructive of our humanity. "To pluralize," Ferguson says, "is to insist on the irreducibility of connections, the excess of the world, and the creativity that arises from learning and responding rather than consolidating and securing."[21] It is for this reason, Ferguson tells us, that "James preferred stories to directives."[22] (Later this semester, we will see that story is important to Latour and Haraway, as well.)

Ferguson argues that most contemporary neoliberal theories of cultural pluralism accept difference merely as a necessary evil that should be overcome if at all possible. Cultural diversity is acceptable, so long as it agrees finally to submit to the rational unity of law and political procedure. Neoliberal pluralism is a description of a chaotic situation in need of a rational solution, while James' radical pluralism is a prescription for a more open and creative society, "an experimental stimulation beyond the usual narrowness of human

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[19] James, *A Pluralistic Universe* (1909), 25.

[20] Though as Zamir points out, in his *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, Hegel prophesied that America was "the land of the future, where, in the ages that lie before us, the burden of the World's History shall reveal itself" (*Dark Voices*, 124).

[21] Ferguson, *Politics in the Pluriverse*, xxv.

[22] Ferguson, *Politics in the Pluriverse*, xxiii.

existence."[23] James' pluralism is also a critique of those opponents of neoliberalism who target "universalist conceptions of power": in a radically pluralistic universe, negotiations of identity and difference take place not through grand and invisible relations of "power," but in more personal, mutually transformative "networks of acquaintance" and "lines of influence."[24]

Ferguson turns to the LGBTQ movement to provide an example of how the "impoverished politics" of neoliberalism operates by construing the situation in terms of the binary question:

> "Are 'homosexuals' (assumed to be a consistent and harmonious category) an interest group that needs and deserves a metaphorical 'seat at the table' in politics, or are they a mortal threat to the homogeneity of the body politic that must be eliminated or at least silenced?"

"If the former," Ferguson continues,

> "then gay politics becomes merely a novel but familiar strain of political discourse: what rights are available and which should be acknowledged (for example, should gays and lesbians be allowed to marry)? If the latter, then a self-normalizing majority can expel mention of homosexuality from all proper institutional channels (schools, mass media, ratings boards), and thus protect children and other innocents from moral decay and corruption."[25]

For James, such a binary construal of the situation shrinks from the challenge of genuine pluralism. It commits Whitehead's fallacy of misplaced concreteness by presupposing abstractly fixed sexual categorizations ("homosexual" v. "heterosexual") that are less "austere and secured" and more fluid and relational than patriarchal consciousness lets on (an issue we will return to in module 2 in light of Keller's reflections on Judith Butler's gender theory).

The ethic of Jamesian pluralism differs from liberal and neoliberal notions of "tolerance": while thinkers like Isiah Berlin were satisfied with "negative freedom" (i.e., "live and let live"/"you mind your business, I'll mind mine"), James affirmed that the continual

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[23] Ferguson, 15.

[24] Ferguson, *Politics in the Pluriverse*, 8.

[25] Ferguson, *Politics in the Pluriverse*, 6.

engagement with otherness is essential for the creation of a healthy self, and for the cultivation of freedom. While liberal pluralism imagines that "individuals" are selves that magically pre-exist politics, material conditions, and social relations, radical pluralism accepts the embodied sociality of individuals. Our rights as free individuals depend entirely on the responsibilities binding us to others. Without such an affirmative commitment to pluralism (as a *prescriptive ideal*, rather than a regrettable description), politics becomes artificially limited to legal negotiations between reified forms of identity within the formal mechanisms of government. Further, radical pluralism resists the monistic metaphysics of global neoliberal capitalism, with its pretense of an "invisible hand" blindly parsing winners from losers, and its dystopian transformation of political actors into economic consumers.

For James, pluralism is decidedly not about finding institutional means to protect selves from the threat of otherness. On the contrary, the multiplicity intrinsic to the psyche and the cosmos demands of us constant growth and creative transformation. James opposes two modes of selfhood, the *Stoic self* and the *sympathetic self*, to illustrate the difference between liberal tolerance and radical pluralism. The Stoic self proceeds narrowly, by exclusion, entrenchment, and retraction, dispossessing itself of all that it cannot control until it is as invulnerable to outside influences as is possible for an organic creature. The sympathetic self, in contrast, proceeds magnanimously in the inverse direction by "expansion and inclusion," always uncertain of the extent of its boundaries.[26]

No matter how we parse it, the self is a decidedly "fluctuating material."[27] What I call *me* and what I call *mine* shift depending on the circumstances. James discusses our bodily selves (which provide only the most ambiguous of barriers between "me" and the wider world—consider, for example, normal bodily processes like eating, breathing, desiring, and dying), our sense of extended identification with our clothing, family, friends, and home, with the products of our labor and artistic expression, with our profession and political associations, with our most inward spiritual powers of thinking, feeling, and willing, and finally, even with God, our most "ideal social self" and source of highest recognition and judgement, "the true, the intimate, the ultimate, the permanent Me which I seek."[28]

Shifting to a more metaphysical register, in the chapters assigned from *Some Problems of Philosophy*, James identifies the distinction between the One and the Many as "the most

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[26] James, *The Principles of Psychology*, Ch. 10: "The Consciousness of Self," 12-13. See also Zamir, *Dark Voices*, 42.

[27] James, *The Principles of Psychology*, Ch. 10: "The Consciousness of Self," 1.

[28] James, *The Principles of Psychology*, Ch. 10: "The Consciousness of Self," 14.

pregnant of all dilemmas of philosophy."[29] Monists, devotees of the One, argue that every disconnection is a mere illusion overcome by some deeper absolute union. This absolute union stands in stark contrast to the disconnections that are plainly evident in common practical and empirical experience. James recounts the mystical monism of Plotinus, the sublime image of the One overflowing in emanations, and compares it to Indian conceptions of Brahman and Krishna. Though undeniably sublime, James laments the fact that such experiences remain beyond the reach of average people. While the adherents of mystical monism "revel in formulas that defy understanding," James champions his radically empirical pluralism as a democratic alternative to such elitist idealism, whose truths are clear only to the initiated.[30]

It is important to carefully distinguish James' pragmatic pluralism from moral and epistemic relativism, and to defend it from the charge of solipsism. James ontological pluralism is not an argument for the relativity of truth. Such arguments are always self-contradictory ("All truths are relative, including this one.") Rather, ontological pluralism argues for the *truth of relativity*—that is, of *relationality*. We—our minds and our worlds—are bound together in common facts of affection, bathed in shared fields of feeling.[31] Truth claims, for a pragmatist like James, are also *value* propositions. Truth does not stand independent of our human feelings, interests, and needs, is not an end in itself but rather "a means toward other vital satisfactions."[32] "Pragmatism gets her general notion of truth," James tells us, "as something essentially bound up with the way in which one moment in our experience may lead us towards other moments which it will be worth while to have been led to."[33]

"New truth," he argues,

> "is always a go-between, a smoother-over of transitions. It marries an old opinion to new fact so as ever to show a minimum of jolt, a maximum of continuity...True ideas are those we can assimilate, validate, corroborate and verify...Truth *happens* to an idea, it *becomes* true, is *made* true by events. Its verity is in fact an event, a

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[29] James, *Some Problems of Philosophy* (excerpted in *TWWJ*, 258).

[30] James, *Some Problems of Philosophy* (excerpted in *TWWJ*, 259-260).

[31] See James, "Affectional Facts" in *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, 137ff.

[32] James, *Pragmatism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975), 35.

[33] James, *Pragmatism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975), 98.

process: the process namely of its verifying itself, its veri-fication. Its validity is the process of its valid-ation."[34]

Rather than base relativism, then, James' pragmatic and process-relational view of truth insists on holding the mind open to the emergence of new truths, new facts, and on concretizing all truth claims by asking what *relevance* they have for the value of our actual lives.

Contrary to the solipsism implied by some forms of subjective idealism, a pluralist ontology affirms that our worlds are not solid, but *porous*.[35] Our worlds are constantly colliding, bending, breaking, and bleeding into one another. The metals of our minds are constantly melting into one another: with each meeting our personalities, our affinities and aversions, our virtues and our vices, mix more inextricably. We are *dividuals* more than individuals. We do not stand apart as isolated private identities, we participate in the formation of one another's identities through dialectics of recognition. The ethics of relational alterity continually pry open all attempts to achieve the closure of self-identification. As Keller argues, "a primal empathy...founds reality," such that "I cannot exist without in some sense taking part in you."[36] James agrees with Plato's pluralist psychology: our psyches are composed of "several selves," such that we are all "social selves," hybrids, symbionts. Even before I arrive in the agora to discuss the political issues of the day with others, I am already a crowd. A person, James tells us, "has as many social selves as there are individuals who recognize [them] and carry an image of [them] in their mind."[37] From James' radically empirical perspective, we overcome our Cartesian doubts about the reality of other minds not by logical proofs or idealistic theories, but through our concrete, pragmatic participation in a stream of pure experience. James' "pure experience" is a perceptual continuum always unfolding beneath the conceptual division only pretending to have hewn subject from object, self from other.

James affirms a pluralist epistemology, which he refers to as a "concatenated" mode of knowing, opposing it to idealistic monism's "consolidated" mode. The former is a "strung-along," "networked," and relational way of knowing, while the latter presupposes an "eternal,

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[34] James, *Pragmatism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975), 35, 97.

[35] See Morton, *Humankind*, 154.

[36] Keller, *From a Broken Web*, 184.

[37] James, *The Principles of Psychology*, Ch. 10: "The Consciousness of Self," 3.

undivided act of omniscience."[38] Examining the physical world, James claims that it exhibits both unity and multiplicity. Interestingly, he claims that "gravitation is the only positively known sort of connection among things that reminds us of the consolidated or monistic form of union."[39] This shows that James is not *reductively* pluralistic and is perfectly willing to grant universality when and where it may be warranted. Of course, in the last few years of his life, the physics of gravitation were in the process of being entirely re-imagined and indeed *relativized* by Einstein, and later, Whitehead.

James goes on to rehearse the empiricists Berkeley, Locke, and Hume's deconstruction of the age old idea of substance.[40] Personal identity is no more than a bundle of temporally synthesized perceptions, argues Locke. Material things are merely spatially grouped sensations, argues Berkeley. The idea of substance itself is but a name given to a collection of simple ideas united only in imagination, argues Hume. The rejection of a substance ontology follows from pluralism's "protest against working our ideas in a vacuum made of conceptual abstractions."[41] James' pragmatic method insists on asking "what difference does an idea make to you and me?" From such a perspective, the obscure transcendentalism of Kant and especially of his idealist successors seems rather beside the point. Kant accepted the empiricist criticisms of substance to a point, admitting that we only ever access an "empirical me"; but he nonetheless posited a "transcendental I" or Ego as the necessary correlate of everything thought or experienced, whether in myself (temporal intuition) or outside (spatial intuition). Kant's transcendental Ego is no longer a clear and distinct substantial reality, as Descartes had imagined. So what is it? For James,

> "The Ego is simply nothing: as ineffectual and windy an abortion as Philosophy can show. It would indeed be one of Reason's tragedies if the good Kant, with all his honesty and strenuous pains, should have deemed this conception an important out birth of his thought. But we have seen that Kant deemed it of next to no importance at all. It was reserved for his Fichtean and Hegelian successors to call it the First Principle of Philosophy, to spell its name in capitals and pronounce it with adoration, to act, in short, as if they were going up in a balloon whenever the notion of it crossed their mind."[42]

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[38] James, *Some Problems of Philosophy* (excerpted in *TWWJ*, 264-265).

[39] James, *Some Problems of Philosophy* (excerpted in *TWWJ*, 265).

[40] James, *Some Problems of Philosophy* (excerpted in *TWWJ*, 261-262).

[41] James, *Some Problems of Philosophy* (excerpted in *TWWJ*, 268).

[42] James, *The Principles of Psychology*, Ch. 10: "The Consciousness of Self," 15.

James thus characterizes transcendentalism as little more than "substantialism grown shame-faced."[43] Kant, though humbler than his absolute idealist inheritors, makes no important advances upon the same old substance ontology—*important* in the sense that they would have some pragmatic consequence for our actual experience. What difference does the "transcendental I" make if we have no experiential access to it? James does not outright deny the possibility of such a transcendental correlator, but affirms as more empirically adequate his own psychological "stream of thought" theory.

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We can now introduce work of W. E. B. Du Bois, whose revolutionary integration of the sociopolitical and autobiographical tested and strengthened James' pluralist vision. Shamoon Zamir celebrates Du Bois' complex multiplicity: his ancestral heritage included a mixture of French Huguenot, Dutch, African, and Native American, and his transdisciplinary approach included equal parts empirical science, idealist philosophy of history, and literary art.[44] In Zamir's terms, Du Bois' early work betrays an uncertain wavering

> "between a typically nineteenth century affirmation of heroic vitalism and natural law as twin guarantors of a progressive historical process and a complex description of the fracture of this confidence and of consciousness' struggle to survive the collapse."[45]

Du Bois understood the deepest significance of his life to derive from its being "part of a problem," namely, "the central problem of the greatest of the world's democracies and so the Problem of the future world."[46] The Problem, of course, is what he referred to as "the color-line." Born just three years after the end of the Civil War, there was for Du Bois no escape from the racism that is woven into the very fabric of American society. He spent much of his life trying to address this Problem, but in the end was forced to accept race, not so much as a clear "concept," but as "a group of contradictory forces, facts, and tendencies."[47]

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[43] James, *The Principles of Psychology*, Ch. 10: "The Consciousness of Self," 15.

[44] Zamir, *Dark Voices*, 6.

[45] Zamir, *Dark Voices*, 4-5.

[46] Du Bois, *Dusk of Dawn*, .

[47] Du Bois, *Dusk of Dawn*, Ch. 5.

Contrary to Zamir's interpretation, Cornel West situates Du Bois squarely within the Jamesian pragmatist lineage. Du Bois studied philosophy and psychology with James at Harvard from 1888-1890, an influence for which Du Bois himself remarked "God be praised."[48] But West also highlights the way Du Bois' work illustrated "the blindnesses and silences in American pragmatist reflections on individuality and democracy."[49] In particular, West singles out James' tendency "[not to see] social structures, only individuals."[50] Despite his pluralistic affirmation of the imperative to grow the self through encounters with difference, in the end it cannot be denied that James valued creative individuality over all else. Like Emerson before him (who was James' godfather), he was suspicious of social movements and causes, even when he shared their progressive values. Du Bois, especially early in his life (probably under James' influence), held similar views regarding the central importance of heroic individuals as the source of societal transformation. But as a black American, he could not escape the prejudices of the society he was born into, and the oppressive limitations these prejudices placed on his individuality and capacity for self-realization.

After being advised to avoid pursuing a career in philosophy by James ("there is not much chance for anyone earning a living as a philosopher"[51]), Du Bois began his career in the late 1890s as a sociologist in the hopes that the Problem of the color-line, of racism and white supremacy, was largely a result of ignorance and could be addressed by a careful empirical study of the economic injustice of black urban life: "The world was thinking wrong about race, because it did not know. The ultimate evil was stupidity. The cure for it was knowledge based on scientific investigation."[52] But as Jim Crow laws continued to tighten their grip in the South, Du Bois realized that he "could not be a calm, cool and detached scientist while Negroes were lynched, murdered and starved."[53] He saw that no amount of empirical evidence would sway the white majority to the black cause because "most Americans answer all questions regarding the Negro *a priori*."[54]

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[48] Du Bois, *Dusk of Dawn* (Transaction Publishers, 1997), 33.

[49] West, *The American Evasion of Philosophy*, 146.

[50] West, *The American Evasion of Philosophy*, 148.

[51] West, *The American Evasion of Philosophy*, 140.

[52] Du Bois, *Dusk of Dawn, 58*.

[53] Du Bois, *The Autobiography of WEB DuBois: A Soliloquy on Viewing My Life from the Last Decade of Its First Century* (New York: International Publishers, 1968), 222.

[54] Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk: Essays and Sketches* (New York: Fawcett, 1961), 81.

In 1910, Du Bois accepted lead editorship of the *Crisis*, the official literary organ of the newly formed National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). His efforts began to shift from scientific description to political agitation, and his influence swelled nationally and internationally. At its peak in 1918, a hundred thousand copies of the *Crisis* were in circulation. In early 1919, an idealistic and, according to West, still "elitist" and "neocolonial" Du Bois organized the second Pan-African Congress in Paris so that Africa might contribute its voice to (and voice its concerns about) what became the Treaty of Versailles ending World War I.[55] He had great hopes that the newly formed League of Nations might improve race relations in the US and abroad. Later in 1919, Du Bois' optimistic vision received a severe blow: the Red Summer saw a surge in racially fueled violence across the US, with riots in 40 cities and hundreds of causalities (in Elaine, Arkansas, as many as 240 blacks were murdered by white rioters).

West remarks that it was during this time that Du Bois found himself increasingly singled out for criticism by socialists to his left for what they saw as his "insufficient grasp of the role of economic and political power."[56] After a trip to post-revolutionary Russia in 1926, his utopian optimism returned and he began a more serious study of Marx. Du Bois came to see that "the founding stones of race antagonism" rest not upon simple ignorance or hatred; he saw, rather, that racism is rooted in "other and stronger and more threatening forces," forces that are "hidden and partially concealed" in the false consciousness enforcing capitalist social relations.[57]

Zamir argues that Du Bois' reading of history falls somewhere between Marx's materialism and Hegel's idealism. He criticizes the St. Louis Hegelians for their rush to the Absolute by contrasting their reading of Hegel's master-slave dialectic with Du Bois' in *The Souls of Black Folk*. Du Bois focuses on the notion of "unhappy consciousness" in the central part of Hegel's masterwork, *The Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807). By dwelling on the negativity of historical experience as expressed by black self-consciousness' life and death struggle for recognition in the master-slave dialectic, Du Bois avoids both Hegel's more speculative rendering of the origins of consciousness as well as the climactic super-synthesis of Absolute Spirit at the end of the *Phenomenology*. "Du Bois' emphasis is not on the singular *Geist* but on souls," as Zamir puts it.[58] St. Louis Hegelians like William Torrey Harris and Henry Brokmeyer used an overly schematic rendering of Hegel's master-slave dialectic to interpret

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[55] West, *The American Evasion of Philosophy*, 144-145.

[56] West, *The American Evasion of Philosophy*, 144-146.

[57] Du Bois, *Dusk of Dawn*, 284.

[58] Zamir, *Dark Voices*, 115.

the Civil War "as a necessary part of the dialectic process of history in which America would assume its rightful and leading place in the onward movement of thought and culture."[59] On Brokmeyer's reading, the Southern thesis of "abstract right" and the Northern antithesis of "abstract morality" had to be overcome through the concrete emergence of an ethically re-unified State. This triumphalist reading of history could be construed as a justification for anything that happens, no matter how morally atrocious, since in the end each phase of the dialectic is just a necessary step in consciousness' inevitable march toward the Absolute Spirit revealed at the end of the historical process. In his book *Hegel's Logic* (1890), Harris goes so far as to argue that the ethical insight arising in the experience of slaves in the antebellum South was crucial for establishing the pool of alienated labor powering the post-Civil War industrial capitalist economy: "...the system of industry demands of each man that he labor at some occupation which produces an article for the market of the world and not for his own consumption."[60]

Zamir emphasizes Du Bois' commitment to situating the psychology of the alienated self relative to its concrete social and historical circumstances.[61] While most reviewers read Du Bois' reflections on "double-consciousness" in *The Souls of Black Folks* as a general analysis of the alienated African-American psyche, Zamir argues that Du Bois' analyses are not meant to apply universally: they are largely autobiographical. Du Bois is narrating his own struggle as a member of the "black middle-class elite facing the failure of [his] own progressive ideals" in the aftermath of the Civil War and white America's half-hearted attempt at Reconstruction.[62] But at the same time, Du Bois' personal confessions often seemed to rise to the level of what Hegel called the World-Spirit, his partial perspective somehow embodying a truth until then unrecognized by the social whole. He at least carried the better part of America's collective conscience to a yet deeper level of self-recognition. In his autobiography, *Dusk of Dawn*, published almost four decades after *Souls*, Du Bois recounts his experience of double-consciousness:

> "In the folds of this European civilization I was born and shall die, imprisoned, conditioned, depressed, exalted and inspired. Integrally a part of it and yet, much more significant, one of its rejected parts; one who expressed in life and action and made vocal to many, a single whirlpool of social entanglement and inner

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[59] Zamir, *Dark Voices*, 125.

[60] Harris, *Hegel's Logic: A Book on the Genesis of the Categories of the Mind: A Critical Exposition* (Chicago: S. C. Griggs and Co., 1890), 87-88. See also Zamir, *Dark Voices*, 131-132.

[61] Zamir, *Dark Voices*, 116-117.

[62] Zamir, *Dark Voices*, 116.

psychological paradox, which always seem to me more significant for the meaning of the world today than other similar and related problems."[63]

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There is no doubt that, compared to James, Du Bois was the more revolutionary and politically engaged philosopher. James, a natural genius who for many years struggled with depression, was nonetheless born into great family wealth and fame, and so it cannot be denied that some of his ideas issued from a privileged perspective and thus should not be hastily universalized. Granting all this, Zamir's argument that James' pragmatic, experience-centered philosophy functions as an apology for consumer capitalism is, I think, clearly overblown.[64] Ferguson's pluralistic political theory and Jamesian critique of liberal "tolerance" provides a more faithful reading of James' project, dispelling Zamir's claim that James' psychology offers only an "ahistorical and apolitical account of the self."[65] Zamir goes so far as to accuse James of "[accepting] the social order as natural rather than a historical construction to be contested," and even labels his pragmatic orientation as "potentially reactionary."[66] In point of fact, James' pluralism was articulated as part of an urgent call to arms against the rise of American imperialism and as a protest on behalf of higher moral, intellectual, and spiritual values against the usual standards of commercial exchange value. It was a plea for the cultivation of a more open and relational form of selfhood, receptive to the creative multifariousness of social and natural reality. The practical purpose of James' radical pluralism is precisely to confound the settled habits and expand the closed conceptions and moral feelings of a narrow-minded society, until "the whole scheme of our customary values" and even our own formerly fixed and supposedly autonomous identities are "riven…and fly to pieces."[67] Finally, contrary to Zamir's claim that James' theories naturalize status quo social relations, James was a thoroughgoing evolutionary thinker for whom the organizing principles of the natural world, far from being ahistorical, are themselves historical constructions. *Nature*, in other words, *is already social* (a surprising finding that Bruno Latour will help us unpack in later modules). While James did not embrace a full-blown cosmopolitical approach, there is not much of a leap from his radical

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[63] Du Bois, *Dusk of Dawn*, Ch. 1.

[64] Other critics of Zamir's reading of James and his influence on Du Bois include Andrew Taylor (*Thinking America*, 2010), Carrie T. Bramen (*The Uses of Variety*, 2009), and Mary Keller (*Recognizing W. E. B. Du Bois in the Twenty-First Century*).

[65] Zamir, *Dark Voices*, 116.

[66] Zamir, Dark Voices, 14-15.

[67] James' "On a Certain Blindness in Human Beings"

pluralism to Whitehead's claim that "we find ourselves in a buzzing world, amid a democracy of fellow creatures."[68] Zamir might retort that the cosmopolitical orientation we will continue to develop this semester is no better than Emerson's attempt to escape the mediation of human society by encountering Nature naked as nothing more than a transparent eye-ball.[69] But this would be a misunderstanding of cosmopolitics, which fully acknowledges social mediation and in fact radically extends our conception of media so that Nature, too, is understood to be a kind of medium.[70] As elemental media theorist John Durham Peters put it:

> "Not all communication is human communication. Animals and machines, atoms and the earth, the seas and the stars are themselves full of curious communications, and our efforts to have intelligence with such entities reform our own practices as well. A vision of communication committed to democracy cannot foreclose on entering into intelligence with radical otherness, including the earth, other species, machines, or extraterrestrial life."[71]

Peters' perspective on the pervasive intelligence of the earth and wider cosmos is shared and expanded upon by each of the thinkers we will explore this semester. The significance of cosmopolitics was not lost on Plato, either. In another highly influential dialogue, the *Timaeus*, narratively situated the day after Socrates speech on the ideal city and the souls of its citizens, Plato has Socrates ask his interlocutors to bring this ideal city to life by pretending it was a historical account of Athens. But before they can offer a convincing account of the ancient city's political life, the astronomer Timaeus is asked to weave a cosmogonic myth or "likely story" that might explain the transcendent source of order, the immanent source of life and motion in the heavens and on earth, and the origin of human beings. Not until the normally backgrounded significance of cosmogenesis is brought to the foreground can the meaning of political existence be properly understood. Though Plato tended to emphasize the soul's rational autonomy, and to value its eternal destiny over the temporal realm of politics, Voegelin insists that

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[68] Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 50.

[69] Zamir, *Dark Voices*, 163-164.

[70] See Segall, "Toward a Communicative Cosmos: Whitehead and Media Ecology" (https://footnotes2plato.com/2017/06/11/toward-a-communicative-cosmos-whitehead-and-media-ecology-draft/)

[71] Peters, "Space, Time, and Communication Theory"

"the Platonic notion of a spiritually formed personality is still embedded in the compact myth of nature. Body and psyche, in spite of their admitted separability, are still fundamentally inseparable."[72]

As is always the case in Plato's dialogues, rational dialectic culminates, not in unambiguous statements of some final truth, but in the pluripotentiality of mythic imagery. In the end, just as the soul can only develop in conjunction with its individual and collective bodies (its society or polis, and ultimately the World-Soul or cosmic socius), rationality and conceptual thought can only develop in conjunction with myth and symbolic imagination. Myth functions, for Plato, as a sort of umbilical cord that links the soul not only to the collective unconscious of human society, but at "the deepest level [puts it in] communication with the primordial forces of the cosmos."[73]

There is plenty to challenge, to revise, invert, and just plain reject in Plato's ancient inauguration of cosmopolitical theory. The philosopher is not, or can no longer be, a solitary hero withdrawing from society, ascending from the cave, and seizing enlightenment for themselves. We are both astral beings, born of the stars, as Plato taught,[74] but also chthonic beings, made of the earth, of *humus*, one humble member in a planetary democracy of fellow creatures. The latter is no "noble lie," but an existential imperative if our alienated species is to have any hope of surviving the current crisis to re-emerge in the form of an ecological humankind.

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[72] Voegelin, *Plato and Aristotle*, 119.

[73] Voegelin, *Plato and Aristotle*, 184.

[74] *Timaeus*, 41e.